Jack Anderson's Washington Merry-go-round

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With Les Whitten

WASHINGTON — Former Vice President Spiro Agnew, convicted of income tax evasion in 1973, has sought a presidential pardon from the man who succeeded him, Gerald Ford.

White House attorneys, perhaps calling the uproar over their boss's pardon of Richard Nixon, politely but firmly referred Agnew's lawyer to the Justice Department.

Agnew's bid for a pardon came shortly after October 10, when his sentence of three years probation expired. An Agnew attorney called White House counsel Philip Buchen's office.

The conversation "was very low key, very professional," a White House official confided. The brief discussion, we have learned, centered on the "receptivity" of the White House to a formal filing for a pardon by Agnew.

"The reply was that there have been procedures established by Justice," the White House official told us. "The request was no more than any good lawyer would do for his client."

Agnew resigned in disgrace on Oct. 10, 1973 when he pleaded no contest to a single count of tax evasion. The plea, equivalent to a conviction, helped Agnew avoid a messy public trial.

At the time, the Justice Department filed a detailed statement which showed that Agnew began accepting payoffs in 1967 when he was governor of Maryland. The payments continued right up to January, 1973, when a federal grand jury began investigating Agnew.

Footnote: We can find no evidence that Agnew took his plea for a pardon to the Justice Department. His lawyer, Judah Best, declined comment.

CAUTIONING CARTER — In finding a labor secretary, Jimmy Carter is caught between the two groups who punched through his election, the blacks and Big Labor.

The Congressional Black Caucus, in a strongly worded private letter to Carter, urged him not to appoint former Ford administration Labor Secretary John Dunlop as his own top man at Labor.

But Big Labor cherishes Dunlop for resigning after President Ford welshed on a promise to support a pro-labor bill. Labor leaders, therefore, are strongly backing Dunlop for the job.

The caucus asserted that Dunlop "demonstrated insensitivity" to minority groups by making "no effort" to upgrade the Labor Department's Office of Federal Contract Compliance. The office is supposed to enforce civil rights laws with federal contractors.

To select Dunlop for the Labor Department job, charged the black legislators, would "be a signal that the new administration is not to begin afresh with a new direction."

Meanwhile, in a recent court deposition, Mary Lepper, the former director of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare's higher education division, has also blasted Dunlop.

She swore that Dunlop, as a Dean at Harvard in 1970-73 "opposed . . . setting goals and time tables" for attracting more women and minority employees to the Ivy League school.

Dunlop, now back at Harvard, twice refused to discuss his record with us. "I'm a private citizen . . . not a candidate for office," he said. "Write any damn thing you please."

Footnote: In fairness to Dunlop, he generally received high marks as Secretary of Labor.

MINERS' FEUD — We recently reported that Arnold Miller, the reform-minded president of the United Mine Workers, suffers from a tarnished image inside the UMW.

Miller has also been feuding with the union's highly - respected secretary - treasurer, Harry Patrick. Their rift has led to the possibility of a return to power by followers of former UMW boss Tony Boyle, who was convicted of the murder of a UMW leader, "Jock" Yablonski.

In a private letter to Miller, Washington attorney, Joe Rauh, who led the fight to oust Boyle from power, pleaded with Miller to meet with Patrick and make peace.

"All the enemies of union democracy are hoping you and Harry will fight to the end . . . Please . . . say you'll meet us." Despite Rauh's plea, however, Miller pulled out of a meeting at the last moment.

Footnote: Miller could not be reached for comment.

WASHINGTON WHIRL— Big banking interests are lobbying to block Rep. Henry Ruess, R.-Wis., from continuing as chairman of the powerful House Banking committee. The pro-consumer Ruess has led the fight for banking reform. This, naturally, has not gone down well with the bankers. Ruess, incidentally, comes from a banking family. But between 1970 and 1973, he gave his entire bank stock, worth $150,000, to various charities.

— Many American Indians want former Oklahoma Sen. Fred Harris for Secretary of the Interior, which oversees Indian affairs. They are organizing a "draft" for Harris, who has led the fight for Indian rights and whose wife LaDonna is a Comanche. A formal petition is being sent to President-elect Jimmy Carter promoting Harris for the post.

— For a few days in August, it looked as if the Martin Luther King murder case would be even further complicated. An urgent, internal Justice Department memo went out to section chiefs stating "Classified Files . . . pertaining to (King) are missing . . ." But it turned out the "purloined papers" had only been misplaced in Justice's Criminal Division.